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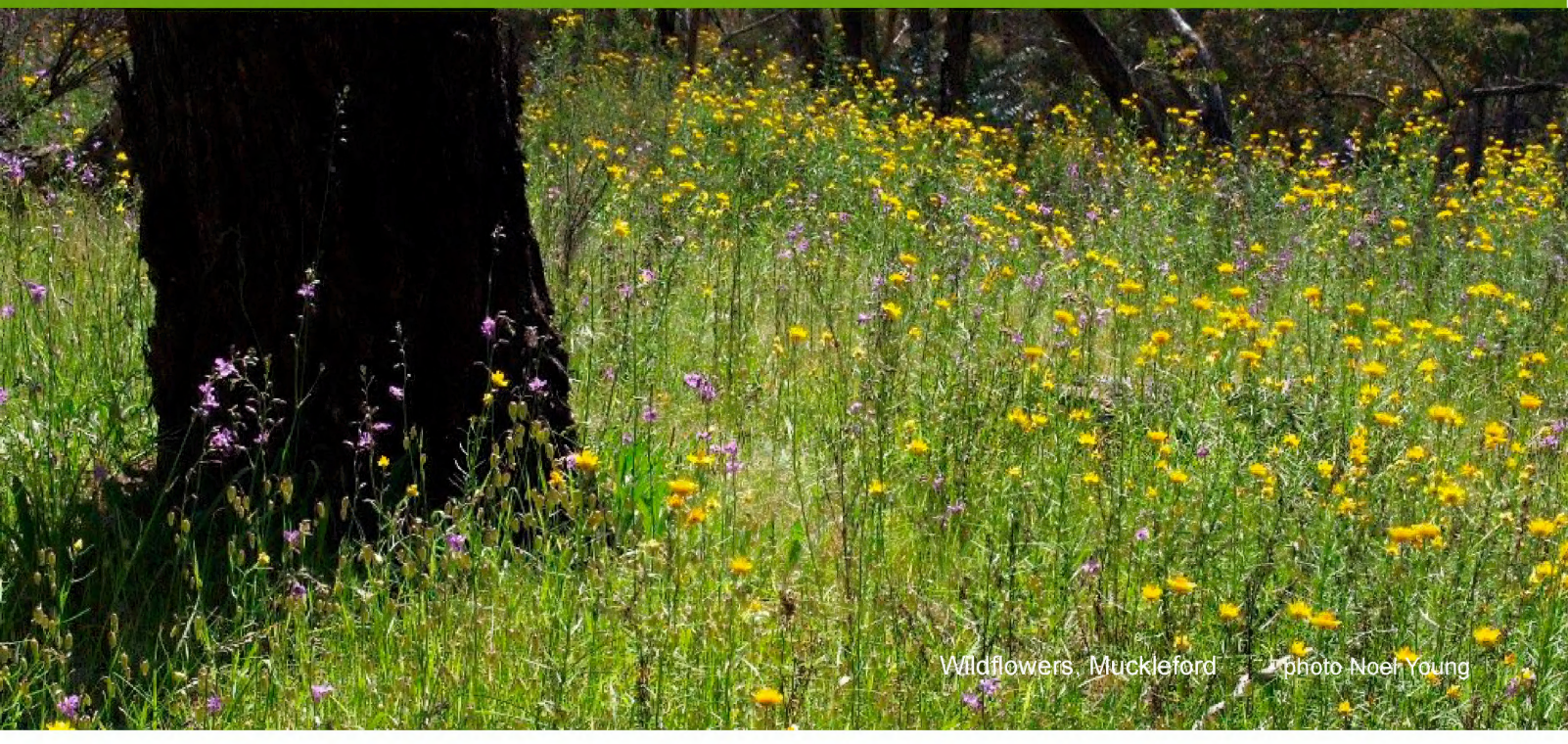


Wildflowers, Muckleford photo Noel Young

A Field Naturalist in Siberia

By Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Because our scheduled speaker was unable to present at our October meeting I stepped in and spoke about the Norwegian zoologist, field naturalist and polar pioneer, Johan Koren (1879-1919), whose biography by the Norwegian author Steinar Wikan I have translated into English for publication in 2026.

From an early age Koren was fascinated by nature and undertook extra-curricular training as a teenager. In his determination to explore the world, in 1879, when he was 17, he signed on as the youngest crew member on a Belgian Antarctic expedition, the first fully scientific expedition to the Antarctic. The expedition ship, *Belgica*, was frozen in ice in the Ross Sea for 15 months, which was a time of great hardship, with no certainty of ever being released. Koren was one of the few who thrived under the harsh conditions, eventually being attached to the scientific staff and gaining a huge amount of knowledge about studying and conserving fauna.

On his return to Norway he was employed by the museum but this did not suit his nature, and he travelled to the far north of Norway for five years to collect birds and animals for research institutions and private collectors. During this time, as part of a Northern Lights Expedition, he overwintered on the Russian-owned islands Novaya Zemlya, making him just the second person in the world to overwinter in the Arctic and Antarctic.

For the rest of his life, which was cut short at the age of 39 by the Spanish Flu, Koren was travelling the world. He was a zoologist on a ship my grandfather was captain of that was wrecked on the Crozet Islands, a sub-Antarctic group of islands, and again proved himself to be extraordinarily resilient. This episode led to Koren being in Australia for a year, in 1908, working to save enough funds for a Siberian expedition of his own. Siberia was a largely unexplored region from a scientific perspective, and Koren was keen to collect birds and animals there.

He was collecting at a time when museums, universities and private collectors, particularly in North America, were developing exhaustive collections and would often pay handsomely for rare specimens.

Koren spent the last ten years of his life braving dangerous ice conditions, extremely cold conditions and isolation. He was shipwrecked a

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung community as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country where we meet and study the natural environment. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

number of times and almost killed several times, but seems to have loved – at least for the most part – the wild country and life without any of the comforts of western civilisation. His two main Siberian expeditions were funded by wealthy private collectors, Harvard University and the Smithsonian Institution. He was admired as an excellent field naturalist, discovered a number of new bird and mammal species and had several named after him. The taxonomy of some of these have changed over time, but they still carry his name.

Studio photo of the young hunter.
Photo: Koren Archive, The National Archives of Norway

A bird named after him is Koren's Willow Ptarmigan *(Lagopus lagopus koreni)*, which is a subspecies of Willow Ptarmigan. Two mammals named after him are Koren's Meadow Mouse (*Microtus koreni)*, which was later reduced to a subspecies under the name *Microtus occonumus koreni*, now Tundra Vole Alexandromys (*Alexandromys oeconomus koreni*), and Koren's Shrew (*Sorex macropygmaeus koreni*), which is now the subspecies *Sorex caecutiens koreni*.

One of Koren's major contributions to ornithology was the discovery of the breeding grounds of a number of migratory birds (by coincidence 10 October this year was World Migratory Bird Day). A number of these migrate to Australia or this region, including the Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*), the Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*), the Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) and the Aleutian Tern (*Onychoprion aleuticus*). This last species was thought to be extinct in Koren's time. Conservation status of the Great Knot is Critically Endangered, the Grey-tailed Tattler and Red-necked Stint are Near Threatened and the Aleutian Tern Vulnerable, with its known colonies currently declining at the rate of 8.5% a year.

Koren is also considered to be the first in the world to have managed to locate the nesting site of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*), which is a small wader that breeds on the coasts of the Bering Sea and winters in Southeast Asia . This species is highly threatened, and it is said that since the 1970s the breeding population has decreased significantly. By 2000, the estimated breeding population of the species was 350–500. Koren found Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks at Kolyuchin Bay on the northeastern coast of Siberia. Scientists and collectors had searched for the eggs for years without finding any, and for a long time the theory was that it must have lived in warmer parts of America. Even today there is a lot of mystery attached to the species, and there are very few pictures.

In addition to collecting living fauna, a focus of the last of Koren's Siberian expeditions included looking for mammal fossils in the rich silt banks of the far eastern Siberian Kolyma River. His team was mainly looking for Woolly Mammoth fossils, but they also collected Woolly Rhinoceros and Steppe Bison fossils, amongst other extinct mammals.

Koren is not well known even in his country of birth, but he led an extraordinary life and made a significant contribution to science, so he deserves to be better known.

One of Koren's Siberian expedition ships, *Kittiwake*, in ice in the Kolyma River, Siberia.
Photo: Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology
© President and Fellows of Harvard College .

Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*).
Photo: Staffan Widstrand/Naturbild.

The Hirsch's Wetland Project, Chewton

On Saturday 11 October our excursion was to the impressive new wetland recently created by Mikael and Helle Hirsch on their property in Chewton. The following description written by Mikael, with some variations and the incorporation of later developments, appeared in the *Chewton Chat* in April and May 2025. It is reproduced with the permission of the author.

Overhead view of the wetlands – a work in progress

In 2023 Helle and I started a planning process of how to turn a grassy paddock into a wetland, and the physical work began just twelve months ago. We have now passed a major milestone of the project with a native fish release.

Nine years ago, we bought our property near Chewton, which included a flat and featureless piece of weedy grass land of about two acres facing the Pyrenees Highway and bordering Wattle Creek, which traverses our land. For some years we had been wondering if we could turn the paddock into a more interesting area, in particular as there was a small waterhole or spring that would spill water across the land into the creek in wet winters, and gradually the idea of a water garden, or wetland, came to light.

We had a detailed survey map drawn up, and then got in contact with local consultant ecologist, Karl Just, who really has been instrumental to the whole project, both in terms of plant selections and general advice. Karl also referred us to a landscape designer to help convert our vision and ideas into a concrete plan. We had a water bore drilled down to 85 metres by Centre State Drilling, and Darren Tolley installed a solar pump. Fortunately the bore has provided plenty of fresh water to top up the wetland and water the first plants, because the summer was remarkably dry.

To protect the area from pesky rabbits, we erected an exclusion fence at the boundary, high enough to keep kangaroos from traversing the land and coming onto the highway.

The tangible transformation began exactly one year ago when Glen Martin and his team started the excavations. Glen grew up in Chewton and has a detailed knowledge of the area, and he made a major contribution to the design and whole construction. Over four weeks heavy machinery reshaped the flat paddock into four deep, connected ponds, while the surplus soil was pushed up into several small hills.

Again, luckily, there was plenty of good clay in the subsoil to line the ponds. Glen then bought in 150 cubic meters of rocks and built gravel paths so we can drive around the wetland, which is very helpful when we need to water the plants.

Glen's team also installed a so-called flat-rack container bridge across the creek so that we have direct access to the area from our house up on the hill. Finally, they helped install a unique piece of artwork in the form of a three-meter-high flower, made from recycled oil tanks by Tread Sculptures. Because Glen carefully excavated around the spring, it continued to flow, and over winter it gradually filled up the ponds to finish the water body.

While the excavation was taking place we placed a major order for wetland plants with Australian Ecosystems' nursery in Melbourne. They specialise in large water reclamation projects and can propagate large numbers of many different species. We also started to gather tube stock of native trees and shrubs from several local nurseries to get a good mixture of plant species that already occur in this area and complement the existing trees on the land.

A team of people helped to plant about 5,000 plants in the wetland and some 600 trees and shrubs on the dry hills. In September, we planted a further 1,600 plants, all herbs such as 4 species of everlastings (swamp everlasting is endangered), swamp billy buttons (also rare), ranunculus etc, and we are expecting delivery of another 2,000 grasses. This will bring the total to almost 10,000 plants.

We plan to do a lot more planting over the coming years, including further restoration of the section of Wattle Creek that abuts the wetland. Despite the dry summer, the plants have grown in leaps and bounds. We have been watering the dryland plants, and some 95% have survived, indeed most have just taken off, which we find very encouraging.

As a local nature conservation project, we want to create a rich biodiversity here. We have already seen lots of tadpoles, dragon flies and water beetles in the water, as well as

attracting more birds such as several species of herons, ducks, a large cormorant and a pair of breeding masked lapwings, but many more species will come as the plantings continue and new food sources are provided. In the coming spring and in future years, we will continue planting local grasses and shrubs, which will attract more birds, butterflies, and other insects to the garden.

Karl Just put us in contact with Dr Peter Rose, Project Manager of the North Central Catchment Management Authority's tri-state native fish recovery project for the Murray River system. The project team is on the lookout for dams and water bodies to assist in breeding endangered fish stock and, because our water plants have grown exceptionally well, 300 endangered Southern Purple-spotted Gudgeons and 200 Southern Pygmy Perches have been released into the wetland. This species was thought to be extinct in Victoria, but now this new wetland is one of several breeding sites for later release into the wild. The wetland is now part of a genetic research project by PhD student Joyshri Sarker from the University of Canberra. Over the years, isolated native populations in the Victorian parts of the Murray River system have led to poor genetic diversity, leading to risk of inbreeding and loss of vitality. To try and address this, our new breeding fish stock was composed of 100 fish from around Lake Alexandrina in South Australia, hoping they would breed with 100 local ones that came from the Bendigo area. Tiny fin samples were taken from both lots of Southern Pygmy Perch for genetic tests as well as DNA extraction from water samples. These fish will spawn in spring and further tests of their offspring will hopefully show improvement of the genetic diversity in our fish population before some will be harvested for release into the Murray River.

This project is the result of a lot of input from many local experts and supplies from several nurseries. We have been very lucky to have so much help with professional advice and labour, and we are confident that the wetland garden will continue to develop beautifully over many years. We are amazed that such a transformation can happen in such short time. We have enlisted the help of a local friend, Peter Watts, who is a semi-retired videographer, to record key milestones, and he has produced a video of the first year's progress that is now available on Chewton.net.

It should be said that this is a private garden and it is not open for the general public, but we will show it to invited groups and join the open garden scheme in due course.

Mikael Hirsch

Top: Pan of the artificial lakes.

Above: Excursion participants inspect progress.

photos: Noel Young

Above: The spectacular sculpture at the entrance.

Left: Cathrine (right) introducing Helle and Mikael Hirsch.

photos: Lou Citroën

Wildflower Wander 3

8th October; Maldon Historic Reserve

A pleasant hour was spent wandering through the Maldon Historic Reserve, off Sinclairs Lane, north of the Victorian Goldfields Railway line.

Sixteen people attended the walk with several joining for the first time. More than thirty species of flora were seen including a number of orchids and the rare Small-flowered Grevillea, flowering well at this time of the year. This plant is restricted to a small area in this vicinity.

Fortunately, the weather was pleasant this year unlike last year when people had to run for their cars when heavy rain began shortly into the wander!

Thanks to Lou Citroën for listing the plants identified by the group.

Phil Hopley

Common name	Botanical name	Grouping
Wax-lip Orchid	*Glossodia major*	Orchid
Chocolate Lily	*Arthropodium strictum*	Herbs & grasses
Sticky Everlasting	*Xerochrysum viscosum*	Herbs & grasses
Gorse Bitter-pea	*Daviesia ulicifolia*	Climbers & creepers
Purplish Beard-orchid	*Calochilus robertsonii*	Orchid
Billy Button	*Craspedia variabilis*	Herbs & grasses
Musky Caladenia	*Caladenia moschata*	Orchid
Downy Grevillea	*Grevillea alpina*	Shrubs
Scented Sun Orchid	*Thelymitra megcalyptra*	Orchid
Cut-leaf Daisy	*Brachyscome multifida*	Herbs & grasses
Pink Fingers	*Caladenia carnea*	Orchid
Many-flowered Mat-rush	*Lomandra multiflora*	Herbs & grasses
Gold-dust Wattle	*Acacia acinacea*	Shrubs
Bushy Needlewood	*Hakea decurrens*	Shrubs
Dusky fingers	*Caladenia fuscata*	Orchid
Nodding Greenhood	*Pterostylis nutans*	Orchid
Tall Sundew	*Drosera auriculata*	Herbs & grasses
Leopard Orchid	*Diuris pardina*	Orchid
Pink Bells	*Tetratheca ciliata*	Shrubs
Grey Everlasting	*Ozothamnus obcordatus*	Shrubs
Fairy Wax-flower	*Philotheca verrucosa*	Shrubs
Slender Rice-flower	*Pimelea linifolia*	Shrubs
Paperbark	*Melaleuca leptospermum*	Shrubs
Poa	*Poa labillardiere*	Herbs & grasses
Twining Fringe-lily	*Thysanotus patersonii*	Herbs & grasses
White Marianth	*Rhytidosporum procumbens*	Shrubs
Murnong (Yam Daisy)	*Microseris walteri*	Herbs & grasses
Native flax	*Linum marginale*	Herbs & grasses
Common Beard-heath	*Leucopogon virgatus*	Shrubs
Primrose Goodenia	*Goodenia blackiana*	Herbs & grasses
Rabbit Ears	*Thelymitra antennifera*	Orchid
Small-flower Grevillea	*Grevillea micrantha*	Shrubs
Matted Bush-pea	*Pultenaea pedunculata*	Shrubs
Early Nancy	*Wurmbea dioica*	Herbs & grasses

Photos from top -

Lou Citroën: The Maldon Reserve, *Lomandra multiflora*, *Caladenia moschata*

Noel Young: *Calochilus robertsonii*, *Thelymitra antennifera*, *Grevillea micrantha*

Ballarat SEANA, October 17-19, 2025

Meetings Friday and Saturday

Eight Club members attended a most interesting and well-organised SEANA meeting hosted by the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat.

The opening evening on Friday took place at the Pax Hill Scout Camp site. Nestled in the bush, the scout camp meeting hall proved an ample and inviting space. In all, ninety participants from 13 clubs attended SEANA 2025.

After the opening welcome from Treasurer Kathy Elder, a context was provided by President Neville Oddie who explained the Ballarat Club's extensive history, with beginnings going back to the 1800s. He commended the organising Committee, all of whom were new to organising a SEANA event such as this.

FNCB Secretary, Emily Noble, then introduced the guest speaker, Nicole Kearney, Manager of the Biodiversity Heritage Library Australia (BHL) and Communications Director of the global Biodiversity Heritage Library.

Nicole provided a fascinating and thorough overview of the breadth and depth of the BHL's work and online resources, showing us the impressive progress the Library has made since she spoke to us in 2024. In particular, with a focus on their recent project 'Capturing the history of Victoria's Field Naturalists Clubs', she emphasised the crucial collective value of Field Naturalist groups' records over time in a rapidly changing climate. This project has already amassed over 38,000 pages of information, covering over 2000 issues she said. Using CFNC as an example, where we have recently uploaded all our club's newsletters from our beginnings in 1976, Nicole urged Field Naturalist groups to follow suit and contribute their valuable records to the BHL.

The Ballarat Golf Club proved a very attractive venue for the General Meeting on Saturday night. Well-known artist, ornithologist, author, conservationist and regenerative farmer, Richard Weatherly OAM, spoke to his contribution to four generations of management to transform his family property, 'Connewarran', into a healthier, more sustainable and biodiverse environment. He also shared some of his wildlife art.

There were two very full days of excursions (no fewer than 13 to choose from!), five of which are reported on here.

- Cathrine Harboe-Ree and Lou Citroën

Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary

This 538ha sanctuary near Linton was established and subsequently donated to BirdLife Australia, Trust for Nature and Parks Victoria by the passionate bird lover and conservationist Gordon Clarke. The Sanctuary is home to over 160 species of woodland and wetland birds including threatened birds like the Powerful Owl, Black-eared Cuckoo and the Diamond Firetail. It also boasts over 350 indigenous plant species, including 50 orchids, and a rich insect life. A number of scientific and training programs are conducted at the sanctuary.

Yellow Robin nest in a melaleuca.

A River Red Gum 'apartment tree', which at least 6 species of birds have used for nesting.

Our bird count for a day's visit was 35. I don't have the plant count, but we saw 8 different orchid species and many other species, although flora in the Sanctuary is suffering in this third year of drought conditions. Our guide was Emily Noble, the dynamic and very knowledgeable manager of the sanctuary. In addition to a walk through the original part pf the Sanctuary, which is called the Bird Paddock, we stopped twice along the road into the Sanctuary to look at orchids. We finished our day at the remarkable Devil's Cauldron Geographical Reserve, which is a broad gorge forged by volcanic activity and the Woady Yaloak River. The cliff faces provide nesting opportunities for birds, including Peregrine Falcons.

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Mt Beckworth Scenic Reserve

The lower reaches of the 615ha scenic reserve at Mt Beckworth near Clunes provided us with a fantastic array of spring plants, including 9 different orchid species (plus hybrids) and many tiny, often overlooked plants. We started the day with a close examination of the tiny plants surrounding a dam and then a stroll along a track absolutely surrounded by flowers. Our guide was Roger Thomas, who we learnt at the dinner

the previous night, has just been awarded the 2025 Australian Natural History Medallion, so we were in excellent hands! After lunch we continued to explore the open woodland of Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), Long-leaved Box (*Eucalyptus goniocalyx*) and other eucalypts, as well as Black Wattles (*Acacia mearnsii*) and Drooping Sheoaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), however orchids were the stars once again. Given the dry conditions we were amazed at the quantities of flowers, especially Waxlip Orchids (*Glossodia major*) and Tall Sundews (*Drosera auriculata*) and Rabbit-ear Orchids (*Thelymitra antennifera*), but so many other flowers that it was impossible to walk without stepping on something. Of special interest to us were the various "donkey orchids" growing there, which are now hybridising: Leopard, Golden Moth and Behr's Cowslip Orchids (*Diuris pardina*, *chryseopsis* and *behrii*).

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Left to right: Golden Moth and Leopard Orchids and their hybrid, and Golden-eye Lichen (*Teloschistes chrysophthalmus*).

Chepstowe and Lake Goldsmith

On the Saturday Geoff and I chose to visit Chepstowe with owner Neville Oddie AO as our leader.

Chepstowe is a working farm of 800 hectares with sheep grazing for wool and meat, and cropping being the main agricultural activities. In recent years, a major focus has been environmental management. Remnant native grasslands, comprising almost one quarter of the farmland, are being protected and enhanced, with some experimental work carried out and monitored. Significant areas of the farm have been planted out to trees and shrubs over many years.

Neville provided plant and bird lists and gave an overview of the geomorphology of the area prior to leading us through his amazing grasslands. Despite the dry, late flowering season we were blown away by the number of grassland species to be seen and could easily imagine the colour changes that must occur as different species come into full bloom! On the day we recorded over 50 plant species and were serenaded by the constant calling of Brown Song Larks. We also saw a number of Small Whip Snakes (*Suta flagellum*) revealed as monitoring tiles were lifted.

Neville explained some of the management methods he uses to enhance and ensure the viability of the grasslands. These included exclusion of all animals for more than 30 years, scalping and direct seeding, slashing, regular burning and weeding.

After lunch we drove to the **Lake Goldsmith Wildlife Reserve** where we walked among the volcanic rocks to the edge of the almost dry lake where Neville explained how after a series of wet years this area can be transformed into a huge expanse of water with an estimated 100,000 birds.

Geraldine Harris

Above left to right: Hoary Sunray *Leucochrysum albicans,* An overview of the Chepstowe grasslands, Little Whip Snake *Suta flagellum*

Above left to right: Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum,* Blushing Bindweed *Convolvulus angustissimus subsp. angustissimus,* Golden Cowslips *Diuris behrii,* Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata*

Morning excursion to Lake Wendouree, North Gardens Wetland Saturday 18 October.

Leader: John Gregurke **Facilitators:** Shirley Faull and Mark Moravec.

On a lovely spring morning 21 SEANA participants enjoyed a leisurely stroll around the North Gardens Wetlands adjacent to Lake Wendouree. The lake has been developed from Yuilles Swamp. It has an area of 238 hectares and is kept full with water from urban storm water and treated sewage water. A total of 178 bird species have been seen at Lake Wendouree. The wetlands area provides excellent habitat for duck, grebe and other waterfowl, migratory waders and bush birds.

John advised us before we began the walk that we were likely to see at least 50 species of birds. At the conclusion, we had recorded 48! Amongst the birds observed were a Magpie Goose, nesting Purple Swamp Hens, a variety of ducks including Musk and Blue-billed, a Marsh Harrier, a Nankeen Night Heron (**see photo**), many cormorants and a variety of woodland birds. The walk is on graded flat paths with many seats along the way. A beautiful way to spend a morning!

On our way back to our cars, we were shown a small island which was rehabilitated many years ago by

FNCB to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Western Victorian Field Naturalists Club Association, 1960-1985.

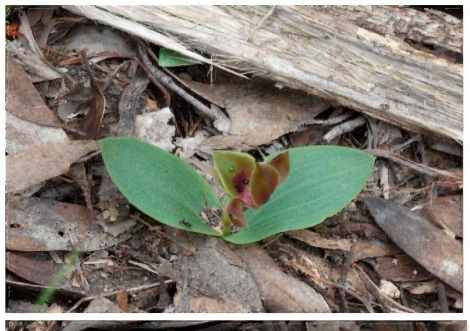
Philip and Judy Hopley

Afternoon excursion to Mt Buninyong Crater, Summit and Union Jack Reserve Saturday 18 October

Co-Leaders and Co-Facilitators: Margaret Rich OAM and Angela Aldred.

Our trip began at the Mt Buninyong Scenic Reserve where Margaret and Angela explained that Mt Buninyong, a forested volcano, is now a Crown Land Reserve of 98 hectares. The area provides an important example of relatively undisturbed native vegetation occurring on a scoria cone. We walked up a steep track to view the impressive caldera that is covered with native grasses. Joel, a member of BirdLife Ballarat, provided assistance with bird identification including a sighting of the Satin Flycatcher and although wildflowers were not prolific we did see a number of Common Bird-Orchids (*Chiloglottis valida)* (photo top right). The group then proceeded by car to the summit of the mount where extensive views of the surrounding plains are available, particularly from the lookout tower.

The second part of the excursion was to the Union Jack Reserve, a 72 hectare area of remnant woodland and streamline vegetation with relics of the 1850s goldrush mining activity. We took a pleasant walk through Peppermint *(E. radiata and E .dives)* and Scent-bark *(E. aromaphioia)* eucalyptus trees and in the open forest along the creek lines we observed Manna Gum *(E, viminalis)* and Swamp Gum *(E. ovata),* Blackwoods *(A. melanoxylon)*, Hedge



Wattle *(A. paradoxa)* and Snake (Thin leaf) Wattle *(A. aculeatissima)* (second photo) were all flowering and attracting bees. With the exception of numerous Tall Sundews *(Drosera auriculata)* only a small number of wildflowers were observed.

Informative notes on the geology, history, flora and fauna for both sites were prepared by FNCB members and distributed at the beginning of the excursion.

Philip and Judy Hopley

Sunday excursion: Bungal Historic Area and Lal Lal Falls

Our leader was Andrew Arnold (FNCB and VFNC member) assisted by facilitators Vireya Jacquard and Graeme Lunt.

The Lal Lal district South of Ballarat has a varied and complex geological structure, giving rise to an interesting early European mining heritage and natural history. Its name derives from local Wathaurong First Nations language referring to the bubbling or running of water in a stream. The meaning of 'Bungal' is unknown.

Our group of 10 assembled at the car park of Lal Lal Railway Station whose attractive heritage buildings, though largely refurbished, remain fenced off from public access.

Opposite the station, diagonally across the intersection of Lal Lal Falls Rd and Yendon-Lal Lal Rd, is an area which, pre white settlement, was the Lal Lal swamp which formed over a granite intrusion. The local Wathaurong people who had lived in this area and whose livelihood depended on the swamp area, were displaced as the swamp was drained to allow the mining of the mineral kaolinite. Kaolinite is a mineral used in various applications such as filler in products such as paper and ceramics and is also used for medical applications.

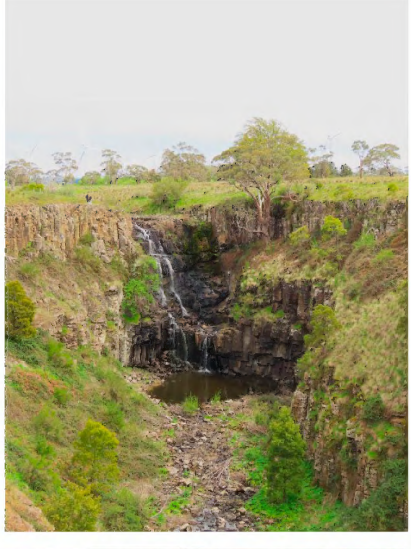
This general area of 283ha was formerly State Forest and contains the site of early iron mines in Victoria and the heritage relics of infrastructure that accompanied them. We were also able to see the Bungal Dam, an important source of water to Ballarat, situated in the Moorabool Valley. The remains of a blast furnace still stand, terraced above the Moorabool River along with an old mine site, exposing the iron deposits and a vestige of the route of the Lal Lal tramway which once linked the mine site to the main Geelong-to-Ballarat railway. The pig iron was transported via the tramway to Ballarat for refining.

Short drives were undertaken to locations with walks to view various features. Interpretive displays along the way, also explain early white settler life in this lonely location during a gold-rush era.

Amongst the native floral gems discovered along the way were Prickly Starwort (*Stellaria pungens*), Twining Fringe-lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*), Tall Sundew (*Drosera auriculata*) and Scented Sundew (*Drosera abberans*) and Wax-lip Orchid (*Glossodia major*).

Aptly, we concluded our excursion with a short drive to a lookout offering a beautiful view of the Lal Lal Falls.

Lou Citroën



Clockwise from above: Lal Lal station; blast furnace remains; Lal Lal Falls; Wax-lip Orchid; Prickly Starwort; Twining Fringe-lily; Scented Sundew.

Photos: Lou Citroën

Challenge Bird Count 2025

With the Aussie Bird Count behind us, it's time to turn our attention to the annual Challenge Bird Count on 6–7 December, and the week on either side of it. Chris Timewell is looking for teams of at least two people (all skill levels welcome) to spend part of a day looking for a range of birds within any habitats occurring in a 25km radius of central Castlemaine. He will then compile the sightings for all the Castlemaine teams and lodge them with the organisers from BirdLife Australia.

A detailed description of the survey instructions and 'rules' is provided on the new dedicated page on the CFNC website (https://). This page also has a summary of recent past results, with more details from early years to be added in the coming months. As well as being a good excuse to go birdwatching, and possibly see some new or interesting species, the Challenge also provides a quick snapshot of the health of the bird community in the local area and contributes to knowledge at a state and national level.

If you have a team already, or would be interested in joining with others to form a team, Chis would love to hear from you (c_timewell@hotmail.com). He can provide more details and also help coordinate locations for the bird searches for each team to avoid double-ups and also get a good coverage.

A rare opportunity to visit Castlemaine's Water Reclamation Plant

Coliban Water is holding an open day on **Saturday 8 November between 10am and 1pm** to showcase what's happening in and around the Castlemaine Water Reclamation Plant.

For those interested in the water cycle, the circular economy, the birds and other wildlife that call the area home, or a history buff fascinated by the development of our sewer network, there will be plenty to see and lots to learn.

When: Saturday 8 November, 10am to 1pm
Where: Castlemaine Pioneers Cemetery Reserve, Langslow Street, Castlemaine (follow the signs for parking)
Guided tour: Departs from the Cemetery Reserve at 12pm (bookings essential - https://connect.coliban.com.)

How did the 'Christmas Bird Count' get started?

Browsing through a December 2017 National Geographic which I had especially ordered for an historical article: entirely unrelated to things of nature, I was flipping through it and almost accidentally landed on an introductory page headed "This tradition is for the birds".

The item commemorated Geoffrey LeBaron's 30th year as director of the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count (in the US).

The Audubon Society, founded in 1905, prides itself on being one of the oldest environmental organisations in the world dedicated to bird conservation. That, in itself, is an impressive record.

Two things about this short item that grabbed my attention were the about-face it describes in attitudes toward conservation, from the 19th century to today and how and why the counts count.

Geoffrey LeBaron explained that the (US) Christmas Bird Count had its beginning in the 1800s as a "Christmas side hunt where people would choose sides and go out during the holiday and hunt. Whoever brought in the biggest pile of birds and other animals won."

With the beginning of the Audubon movement, increasing awareness of the need for conservation, ornithologist Fran Chapman proposed that the 'holiday hunt' change to a bird census; something of a revolution in enlightened thinking.

Another clear message this article provided was about the value of a count as a tool to monitor change before it heralds alarm; while numbers are still plentiful.

LeBaron cited an example where, in 2009, analysis of count data showed that the wintering ranges of more than 300 bird species had moved as much as 200 miles Northward over a 40-year period, leading to research into the reasons for it.

My further reading has revealed that, perhaps unsurprisingly, climate change, particularly temperature increases, had made and is making higher latitudes and elevations more habitable for more bird species.

Lou Citroën

Observations

Welcome Swallow - photo Noel Young

Lawrie Conole: Common Dunnart near Guildford

In my ongoing low level attempt to fill in the 'fauna database black hole' that is the Upper Loddon State Forest! ... little crumbs of data accidentally discovered. A mix of happenstance, passive acoustic monitoring and direct surveys has so far added Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider, Common Dunnart, Mountain Brushtail Possum, White-throated Nightjar, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and various other critters so far in 2025. This one from yesterday - an owl pellet found while doing something completely unrelated to ecology.

https://www.facebook.com/share/p/14SeFjQzYBo/

https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/observations/323966311

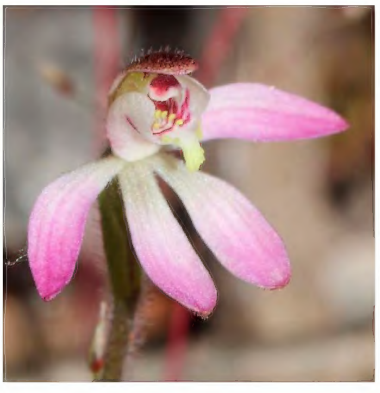
Kerrie Jennings: Curlew Sandpiper

In early October, CFNC member Kerrie Jennings was completing a regular Birdlife “Birds on Farms” survey of the family’s farm dam when soft movement quietly caught her eye in the few short metres between where she was standing and the dam’s shoreline. A quick snap of the camera and further investigation identified the mystery wader as a migratory shorebird from the Northern Hemisphere, a once abundant, but now Critically Endangered Curlew Sandpiper. Further information: Natural Newstead blog.

https://geoffpark.wordpress.com/2025/10/05/keep-an-eye-out/

Russel Stanley: October Orchids

A few of the 'less encountered' Castlemaine district orchid species I've come across over the past month.



The Tiny Fingers *Caladenia pusilla*. Quite a few flowering at the Rise & Shine Reserve near Newstead. I even found a hypochromic form!

Left: Little Bronze Caps *Caladenia transitoria* flowering in the Fryers Ridge area. These are so tiny and flowers only last a few days so they're easily missed.

Right: Short-Lipped Leek Orchid – *Prasophyllum brevilabre*. This one was on my search list and I was alerted to where it could be found flowering at Fryers Range by Jenny Horner. Only two plants that we could find defended tenaciously by a large Jumper Ant colony!

Noel Young: Gang-gang Cockatoos, Post Office Hill Reserve

Following reports of sightings in the district over 2 or 3 months, I came across a pair on October 8.

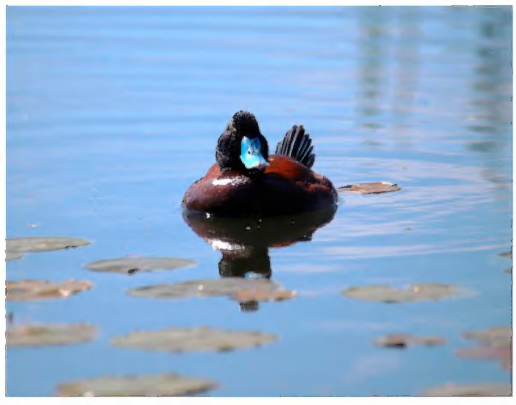
Female (left), accompanying a male (right) feeding on Eucalypt nuts.

Lou Citroën

On the SEANA Ballarat excursion to Lake Wendouree

A Blue-billed Duck and

Nankeen Night-Heron



Coming Events in November

Monthly General Meeting, Friday 14th November, 7.30pm

Uniting Church **Chapel**, Lyttleton St.

Speaker: Richard Alcorn (Geelong Field Naturalists Club), "eBird Data Explorations"

Combined meeting with Birdlife Castlemaine District

With backgrounds in computer programming and a passion for recording bird observations, Richard and Margaret Alcorn developed the world's first on-line bird atlassing system called Eremaea Birds, launched in 2003. This proved very successful and after 10 years it was merged with eBird, a global database managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, US. In this talk, Richard will show us what can be learnt about bird movements and trends using citizen science data from eBird with many interesting examples and insights from the Geelong and Castlemaine regions.

Observations: Members and visitors are invited to share their recent interesting observations at the meeting. Please email any photos as uncropped JPEG file(s) and supporting notes to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursion, Saturday 15th November, 9.30am

Leader: Euan Moore, "Bird and wildflower walk", Maldon Historic Reserve

Combined walk with Birdlife Castlemaine District

Richard and Margaret Alcorn will join us for a walk in the Maldon Historic Reserve, in the morning this month to favour the birds. This area has a rich and diverse bird community as well as some interesting and rare native plants.

Meet: at the northern end of the Car Park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St, Castlemaine for a prompt **9.30am** departure (car-pooling as much as possible).

Bring: Water, snacks, **clean** sturdy shoes, chairs and morning tea.

All welcome.

Roadside Clean-up, Monday 17th November, 9.00am

Help keep our stretch of the Pyrenees Highway clean!

Join us for the last of our four checks this year of a section of the Pyrenees Highway, west of Castlemaine from the top of McKenzie's Hill to Woodman's Road. Many hands make light work as we enjoy a pleasant walk along some interesting roadside bush and do our bit for the community.

Meet: 9am near Tait's Decorative Iron, corner of Willy Milly Rd and Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine.

Bring: Gloves, water, sturdy footwear. Garbage bags and safety vests supplied.

Contact: Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up.

Spreading Wattle - photo Noel Young

Program

Monthly meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall (or, in November, the Chapel), Lyttleton St. Castlemaine commencing at 7.30pm.

Members and visitors are invited to share their interesting observations at these meetings. Please email any photos to illustrate your report as uncropped JPEG file(s) to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions are held on the Saturday following the monthly meeting and leave from the northern end of the car park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. at 1.30pm unless stated otherwise.

See "Coming Events" page for more details about November events.

Fri 14th November 7.30pm
Meeting (UC Chapel): "**eBird Data Explorations**"
Speaker: Richard Alcorn (Geelong Field Naturalists Club)
Combined meeting with Birdlife Castlemaine District

Sat 15th November 9.30am
Excursion: "Bird and wildflower walk in the Maldon Historic Reserve"
Leader: Euan Moore
Combined walk with Birdlife Castlemaine District

Mon 17th November 9am
Roadside Clean-up
Leader: Geoff Harris

Challenge Bird Count, 6th-7th December
Contact: Chris Timewell See page 10 for details

Fri 12th December 7.30pm
Meeting: Members' night!
Share your nature highlight of the year.

Sat 13th December 1.30pm
Excursion: "Rock of Ages, Maldon"
Walk and end-of-year afternoon tea

Visitors are welcome at club activities

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Membership
Includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.(Membership forms on CFNC website)

Single $35, Family $50
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December edition deadline: **November 28**

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The Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans* is the emblem of the club. Design by Rita Mills.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.